

"How do you kill a bank?" mused Christopher Guerra on a blustery morning at Zuccotti Park.

"Strip it of its capital. You can't defeat banks head-on because they're too powerful."

Guerra, 27, said he hopes Bank Transfer Day -- a social media push that encourages consumers to pull their money out of banks and deposit it into credit unions by or on Nov. 5 -- will help to deprive banks of some of the money they need to function.

Occupy Wall Street and Bank Transfer Day aren't officially affiliated, but the two movements draw their strength from similar sentiments: consumers tired of relying on big banks that they argue take advantage of them through lending practices and fees. Though the push for the bank transfer movement began with Kristen Christian, a 27-year-old Los Angeles-based entrepreneur, Occupy Wall Street protesters have become some of the most visible supporters of Bank Transfer Day, allowing them to drive the conversation surrounding Saturday's deadline.

Christian told the HuffPost this week that she's appreciative of the support she's gotten from Occupy Wall Street protesters such as Guerra, but she added that she hopes the movement doesn't take any more "disruptive actions" -- such as the protest in a New York City Citibank last month that resulted in two-dozen arrests -- in the name of taking money out of banks.

Conor Reed, who was arrested in the Citibank protest, said that while some may act individually to commemorate Bank Transfer Day, he hopes the actions spark a larger conversation. But he also said he's concerned that police may "harass" bank transfer activists that are working non-violently.

"My hope is that tomorrow people will go to banks together, hold rallies outside, slowly and sweetly transfer their accounts to gum up business as usual, share the reasons for their activities with other customers, and then open the horizons for social action more widely," Reed wrote in an e-mail to HuffPost Friday.

For the protesters' part, it seems they have no plans for an organized, mass run on the banks; instead they're looking to draw attention to the cozy relationship between government and the banking industry. Activists associated with Occupy Wall Street plan on Saturday to march from Liberty Plaza to Foley Square -- the site of the New York Supreme Courthouse -- to protest a deal that government officials are negotiating with banks to settle allegations that the companies illegally foreclosed on homeowners.

"People are still furious at the banks and so the question is, how do we change them?" asked Max Berger, one of the organizers of Saturday's march. "It's all about holding the banks accountable and not letting their political allies off the hook."

Christian's call and the Occupy protests have touched a nerve with consumers and likely with banks as well. Christian said she sent out Facebook event invitations to 500 of her friends after Bank of America announced in September that it would charge customers \$5 per month to use their debit cards. The page now shows tens of thousands attending Bank Transfer Day.

An even more tangible measure of the movement's success: The Credit Union National Association estimates that 650,000 customers have opened new accounts at credit unions since Bank of America announced the fee. More than 80 percent of the credit unions that saw an increase in new account openings attributed the boost to big bank fees or a mix of reactions to the fees, and the Bank Transfer Day push.

Christian and other Bank Transfer Day advocates say one way for consumers to take back control of their money is to move it to credit unions, which are often tied to specific locations and function as non-profit cooperatives.

"They don't take out the risky loans," said Deborah Butler, one of the protesters at Zuccotti on Friday. "They know who they're loaning to."

Mark Bray, a member of the Occupy Wall Street Press Team, said the protests can't take credit for the bank's decision to scrap the fee, but he thinks it's changed the conversation for some consumers, who before wouldn't have thought of taking a stand against something like a bank fee.

"Fundamentally, [Bank of America dropped the charge] because people don't want to pay the fee and they were switching banks," Bray said. "We're creating a climate where these kinds of things can happen."

For some activists at the park, the relationship between the two movements works both ways. Louis Daniel, a former foreman for an independent contractor, said he thinks Bank Transfer Day will show the public that Occupy Wall Street "actually means business." Daniel has been out of work for eight months.

"I imagine just regular old people, dressed in regular old clothes going in and saying 'I want to pull my money out,'" Daniel, 31, said. "It seems like they're coming in to make a deposit and they're not."

Even if consumers decide to withdraw their funds in a relatively laid-back fashion, Thadeus Umpster, a protester who was at Zuccotti on Friday, said he hopes the banks will feel the sting.

"I hope it's more than a message, I hope it hurts them," Umpster said. "People are not happy with the banks, the system. The more people that participate, the more clear that will be."

Umpster said Bank Transfer Day will also have the benefit of helping people across the country connect with the protesters in Zuccotti Park.

"People who haven't been able to get down here will be able to participate," he said.

Though Umpster said he was upset by the bank fees, for him, Bank Transfer Day is about taking a stand against more than just added charges. He cited banks' checkered history of discriminatory loan practices.

Another protester at the park, Ayenay Abye, said she agreed, arguing that banks used predatory lending practices, which are partly to blame to the financial meltdown. In the aftermath of the crisis, critics alleged that banks targeted low-income borrowers and encouraged them to take out home loans that they normally wouldn't qualify for during the housing boom. In one example of the criticism, the Department of Justice is investigating Wells Fargo for allegedly directing African-American borrowers into high-cost, subprime loans.

"They take our money and discriminate against us," Abye said. "It's important for communities to have control over their own resources."

For his part, Bray says he thinks transferring money from banks to credit unions is one tangible way for Occupy Wall Street to get its message across.

"What it shows is that the movement as a whole isn't about not buying things, it isn't about hiding your money under a mattress, it's about valuing the material conditions of working people," Bray said. "It's a reasonable step, it's a concrete step and it's something that we can do as consumers."